

**MS Thesis**  
**Department of Environmental Science and Policy**  
**College of Science**  
**George Mason University**

**Candidate:** Nicole Bayne

**Defense Date and Time:** December 2, 9:15 AM – 11 AM

**Defense Location:** ESP Conference Room, David King Hall 3006

**Title:** Coral Reef Crisis Framing: An Analysis of Coral Reef Print Media News Coverage in Florida and Hawaii (1997-2019)

**Thesis Director:** Dr. Katherine Rowan

**Committee:** Dr. Xiaomei Cai, Dr. Esther Peters

**ABSTRACT**

Coral reefs are environmentally and economically beneficial to many coastal communities, but anthropogenic stressors have decimated these ecosystems. Reefs continue to decline in Florida despite increased research funding. However, as a possible result of regulating anthropogenic stressors like overfishing and pollution, Hawaiian coral reefs have been recovering. This suggests a need for increased awareness of the potential for reef recovery and those steps that assist recovery. To explore the role of local news in providing coral reef communities with this information, a quantitative content analysis examined the framing of coral reef decline since 1997 within Floridian and Hawaiian print newspaper articles purposively sampled from Newspapers.com (n = 389). Intercoder reliability for each variable in the coding rubric was established using Krippendorff's Alpha ( $\alpha > .800$ ) on 15% of the dataset (n = 58). A second coder was then employed to assess 30% of the remaining sample (n = 98). Results of t-tests and crosstabs chi-square analyses found no significant differences between the ways news stories in these two states covered the coral crisis except in one respect: Hawaiian print news articles reported significantly more instances of government actions taken to conserve coral reefs than did Floridian articles. This finding partially supports a study hypothesis that the frequency and type of government action reported in state news would be linked to the apparent health of coral reefs in each state.